

## 16. NESTS OF THICKBILLED FLOWERPECKER

In his "BIRDS OF KERALA", Dr. Sálím Ali mentions that there is no specific nesting data on the Thickbilled Flowerpecker (*Dicaeum agile*) in Kerala. This species is common in the Peechi-Vazhani Wildlife Sanctuary (Trichur district) and I had the opportunity to locate five nests of this species.

The nests were seen between the months December to March. The majority (four out of five) of the nests were seen in the months of February to March. One nest, that was first seen under construction on 31 December 1991 had a young one sitting outside it on 1 February 1992, suggesting that the period of incubation and fledging is less than a month.

The nests were pouch-shaped and suspended from thin branches or twigs. They were constructed with vegetable matters (fibres) and were well camouflaged.

One of the nests was at an height of 2 m from the ground, on a bush while an exceptional nest was about 18 m from the ground, on a *Terminalia* tree. Three others were placed at heights ranging from 3.5-11 m the known range, according to the HANDBOOK. The nests were located in fairly disturbed forests and in Teak-Bombax plantations.

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17. SEASONAL MOVEMENTS IN SMALL SUNBIRD (*NECTARINIA MINIMA*) AND EMERALD DOVE (*CHALCOPHAPS INDICA*)

The lower altitudes of the Peechi-Vazhani Wildlife Sanctuary (Trichur district, Kerala) have four species of sunbirds — Purple (*Nectarinia asiatica*), Purplerumped (*N. zeylonica*), Maroonbreasted (*N. lotenia*), Small (*N. minima*) and the Little Spiderhunter (*Arachnothera longirostris*). Of these, all but the Small Sunbird are permanent residents though the Spiderhunter is the least common and patchily distributed. The sightings of the Small Sunbirds at Peechi (foothills) suggested a pattern indicating the bird has regular seasonal movements that are perhaps linked with the rains.

My sightings of the Small Sunbird have been just before and after the southwest monsoon. In the monsoon months of August and September, it is quite common. It can then be seen not only in the forest areas but also in the campuses like the Veterinary College Campus at Mannuthy, on the outskirts of Trichur town. After September, the bird

becomes scarce at the foothills of Peechi and gradually disappears. It then makes its appearance again towards the end of the dry season, in early May, after the first few summer showers and a few weeks before the onset of the monsoon (in early June).

Elsewhere, in the upper reaches and stretches bordering the semi-evergreen forest, I have seen the Small Sunbird in February-March, the peak of the dry season. During the months the bird visits the Peechi foothills, it is quite common. Incidentally, in the other months, the Purple and Purplerumped sunbirds are the commonest.

Another bird that appears to show some seasonal movements is the Emerald Dove. It is quite common in the environs of Peechi in the months of August-October. It does not disappear totally in the dry months like the Small Sunbird, though its numbers are definitely lower

than during the wet season. I have not seen its nests or any signs of its breeding in my study areas.

Seasonal movements in nectar-and fruit eating birds have been recorded in literature. It may be interesting to investigate such movements in order to understand the habitat requirements of these specialized species for conservation planning.

### 18. VARIATIONS IN OLIVEBACKED SUNBIRDS *NECTARINIA JUGULARIS* (LINNAEUS) OF ANDAMAN, CAR, CENTRAL AND GREAT NICOBAR ISLAND

While cataloguing the sunbirds in the BNHS Collection (Catalogue Part 37), I had noticed the differences among birds within the same race of the species *Nectarinia jugularis*, collected from different islands of the Andamans and Nicobars. I critically studied the 32 specimens of *N. jugularis* innumerable times, arranging them island-wise, and each time noticed the variations among them. The 25 subspecies of *N. jugularis*, listed in the checklist of the birds of the world (A complete checklist of the Birds of the World, Richard Howard and Alick Moore 1980, Oxford University Press) are distributed mainly on the islands of south and southeast Asia, from the Andamans, Malaysia, Singapore, Sumatra, Java, Borneo, Philippines, Sula Is., Kei Is., New Guinea to the Solomon Islands east of New Guinea (The Reader's Digest Great World Atlas, 1981, p. 94-95). Out of the 25 subspecies, 3 are in the Indian list, found in the various islands of Andamans and Nicobars.

The 19 islands comprising Nicobars are more widely dispersed than the 204 in Andamans, hence chances of geographic isolation or the formation of races are more in the Nicobars.

#### *Nectarinia jugularis andamanica* (Hume) (Andaman group)

We have specimens both from Andaman (n=6) and Narcondam (n=6), an island 128 km from

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Andaman towards Tavoi, Myanmar. Narcondam birds are slightly, but consistently larger in their wing and tail measurements: male wing 56-60 mm (53-55 in Andaman birds), tail 33-34 mm (30-31 in Andaman). The pectoral tufts are brighter in the Andaman birds. In the absence of any other major difference, Narcondam birds are grouped with the Andaman birds under the same subspecies.

#### *Nectarinia jugularis klossi* (Richmond) (Great Nicobar)

There are two groups of specimens of this subspecies, one from Campbell Bay in Great Nicobar (n=4) and the other (n=6) from islands to the north, and below Car Nicobar (*proselia*). There is almost no difference in wing and tail sizes between these two groups, but birds from Great Nicobar have a larger bill (20.5 mm) than those from Trinkut and Nancowry (16.5 - 18 mm). The pectoral tufts in the northern birds are almost as bright as those in *proselia*, whereas in the southern Campbell Bay birds, they are duller. With a larger series of birds it may be possible to separate these two groups into races. We do not have access to the topotypes of Baker's *blanfordi* from Kondol Island, which is treated as a synonym of *klossi*, but it is possible that a comparison of skins from Great Nicobar with those from Kondol Island may show reasons for their separation.